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“You have ruined this entire experiment...shall we stop talking now?” Orientations to the experimental setting as an interactional resource

Dr Nicci MacLeod n.macleod1@aston.ac.uk (corresponding author)

Professor Tim Grant t.d.grant@aston.ac.uk

Centre for Forensic Linguistics

Aston University

Aston Triangle

Birmingham

B4 7ET

Bio notes

Dr Nicci MacLeod is a Research Associate at the Centre for Forensic Linguistics, Aston University, currently employed on a project examining the relationship between language and online identities. Her research interests lie in two key areas: the relationship between language and identity in online contexts, and the application of linguistic theory to police interviewing. She has published on both of these topics, and continues to be involved in police training in both of these areas.

Professor Tim Grant is professor of Forensic Linguistics and Director of the Centre for Forensic Linguistics at Aston University. He has been the Principle Investigator on the projects Assuming Identities Online and Assuming Identities Online 2. His main research areas are within the area of forensic linguistics, including authorship analysis and the language of police interviewing. He has provided expert consultancy and testimony in the areas of authorship analysis and the analysis of abusive and threatening communications, and also provides training to the police in these areas.

“You have ruined this entire experiment...shall we stop talking now?” Orientations to the experimental setting as an interactional resource

Abstract

One limitation widely noted in sociolinguistics is the tension presented by the ‘observer’s paradox’ (Labov, 1972), i.e. the notion that everyday language is susceptible to contamination by observation (Stubbs, 1983: 224). The observer’s paradox has been perceived to present significant challenges to traditional sociolinguistic researchers seeking to explore the processes at work during ordinary interaction. More recently, scholars have begun to argue that in fact the presence of a recording device, rather than being a mere constraint on spoken interaction, is in itself an interactional resource explicitly oriented to by participants (Speer & Hutchby 2003; Gordon 2012). Drawing on a collection of transcripts collected in experimental conditions as part of a wider project exploring the relationship between language and identity, this paper seeks to explore how these orientations manifest themselves in the context of Instant Messaging (IM) conversations. We show different orientations to the experimental setting, and different understandings of the role of the researcher – represented in this case by the IM chat archive – as both a topic of discussion and as a participant themselves.

Keywords: observer’s paradox; instant messaging; footing; audience; assuming identities online

1. Introduction

While the ability to record spontaneous language use is an undisputed necessity for studying it, the presence of a recording device has traditionally been viewed as a limitation on scholarly attempts to investigate ‘naturally-occurring’ interaction, and as inhibiting participants’ production of ‘naturalistic’ speech. Language produced entirely independently of the researcher has long been contrasted favourably with researcher-generated data (see Potter, 2004), owing to the myriad problems perceived to arise from researcher influence. Contrastingly, more recent scholarship (some of which is discussed below) has demonstrated that in studies of spoken language the audio recorder can actually serve as an interactional resource for speakers; that it can itself fulfil the role of a participant of sorts; and that it can be used to construct and maintain distinctive identities.

The concept of the ‘observer’s paradox’ was introduced by Labov (1972), who suggests that the influence of sociolinguistic fieldworkers should be kept to a minimum in order to capture ‘natural’ language use, and that the very presence of a researcher or recording equipment fundamentally alters interaction. It is widely acknowledged that the effects of the observer’s paradox cannot be entirely eliminated, but attempts to mitigate them are standard practice among sociolinguistic researchers.

Yet there are firm grounds for arguing that there is no such thing as truly ‘natural’ language use at all. Bell (1984; 2001), for example, suggests that shifts in style occur primarily as a result of the speaker’s audience, which is rather at odds with the suggestion that there is something called ‘natural speech’. For Bell, it is who can (or may be able to) hear us that has

1 a greater effect on how we speak than any other factor, rendering the very notion of an
2 individual's language patterns ever being 'uncontaminated' by the observation process a
3 rather ludicrous suggestion (see Wertheim, 2006).
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6 7 **2. Background**

8 Perhaps the earliest attempt to turn the notion of the observer's paradox on its head and focus
9 on the effects of the recording device on speech as an academic object of interest was Wilson
10 (1987). Inspired by the observation that sociolinguists were going to great lengths to
11 minimise the effects of observational procedures and yet no evidence existed for the relative
12 success of these attempts, Wilson set out to focus on what might be 'sociolinguistically
13 interesting' about speech styles that are themselves created by methodological processes. He
14 observed that participants regularly made reference to the recording device and treated the
15 researcher as an audience. This is echoed by Schilling-Estes (1998), who remarked that
16 valuable insights can be gained through investigating what she terms 'performance speech'.
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19 More recently, the question of what constitutes 'naturally occurring' data has garnered
20 substantial debate, perhaps most notably in a 2002 issue of the journal *Discourse Studies*,
21 where scholars from a range of disciplines discussed the nature of the 'natural'/'contrived'
22 distinction (Lynch 2002; Potter 2002; Speer 2002a, 2002b; Tenhave 2002). Speer (2002a)
23 problematizes the distinction, arguing that from a discursive perspective it makes very little
24 sense to map it on to particular methods of data collection, as is standard practice within
25 Conversation Analysis and Discursive Psychology. Rather, she argues, it would be interesting
26 to focus on participants' own orientations, to examine how they "attend to the fact of their
27 being involved in a social science investigation, looking at moments where they treat the
28 setting as somehow non-natural, or attend to the occasion as a contrived one...and consider
29 what such orientations tell us about the impact of the research context" (2002a: 518).
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32 With this in mind, Speer & Hutchby (2003) propose an alternative approach to the issue of
33 authenticity by conceptualising orientations to the presence of recording equipment as
34 analytical objects in their own right. Drawing data from interviews and conversations where
35 participants were, in general, fully aware that their interactions were being recorded, they
36 demonstrate ways in which this knowledge comes to be treated discursively, and how 'being
37 recorded' is used as a resource for managing ongoing talk. It could be said that such an
38 approach shifts the perspective of the recording process from the analyst to the participant,
39 and in so doing allows for exploration of how participants exploit it in order to facilitate a
40 range of activities.
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43 Subverting the observer's paradox, Wertheim (2006) adopts Bell's (1984, 2001) concept of
44 audience design to account for the fieldworker's role in observed interactions. Noting that the
45 presence of herself as a language investigator almost invariably resulted in self-aware
46 'performance' styles of speech from her participants, Wertheim interprets the phenomenon
47 with reference to both the speaker's assessment of her social role, and to her participant role
48 in the speech event under scrutiny. Her analyses lead her to adjust Bell's (1984) hierarchy of
49 audience roles, since the end listener of recorded interaction is at once *ratified* and *unknown* –
50 criteria not fulfilled by any of the roles in Bell's framework. As Wertheim asserts, rather than
51 labelling the speech patterns of a participant who knows they are being recorded as
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1 ‘unnatural’, we might instead want to consider the possibility that they are “trying to grapple
2 with a participant role they have never dealt with before, that of the unknown eavesdropper
3 who is nonetheless ratified” (2006: 721).

4 From an ethnographic perspective Monahan & Fisher (2010) seek to further the arguments
5 for focusing on participants’ ‘performances’, arguing that they have the potential to “reveal
6 profound truths about social and/ or cultural phenomena” (p. 358). They argue that as agents,
7 participants need to make sense of and arguably influence researchers, and that responses to
8 researchers are important data in and of themselves. Performances from participants, they
9 claim, “are valuable treasures of meaning, abundantly wrapped in multiple layers of interest,
10 assumption and concern; they are alluring conceits overflowing with interpretive possibility”
11 (2010: 371).

12 Drawing on Goffman’s notions of ‘frame’ and ‘footing’, Gordon (2012) shows how
13 participants in spoken interaction orient to the recorder variously as an object and as a
14 person(s), within a literal or non-literal (‘playful’) frame. Within the literal frame she shows
15 that participants variously orient to the recorder as a burden, as a data collector, and as a
16 stand-in for the researcher, while within a non-literal frame she points to examples of
17 participants staging performances for the recorder as if it were an audience for them to
18 entertain. These varying orientations to the observation process highlight its position as a
19 resource for participants, rather than merely an intrusive limitation on the ‘naturalness’ of the
20 data elicited.

21 Most recently, Goodman & Speer (2016) strongly argue for a viewpoint which does not
22 consider researcher-generated and naturally occurring data to be discrete ‘types’ of data,
23 reiterating Griffin’s (2007) suggestion that the concept of *any* talk being ‘natural’ is
24 problematic, given that *all* talk is mediated by the context in which it occurs. The presence of
25 the researcher allows for the accomplishment of a wide array of interactional tasks, centrally
26 the management of particular identities, and this is evidenced by Goodman & Speer’s
27 analyses.

28 In summary, the research discussed here demonstrates that the re-examination of the presence
29 of the observer – less as a paradox and more as an object of study in itself – has proven itself
30 to be a worthwhile endeavour in the study of spoken interaction. Less well explored is the
31 role of the researcher in the context of text-facilitated computer-mediated communication,
32 specifically under the experimental conditions described above. This article represents an
33 endeavour to address that gap.

34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 **3. Data and Method**

51 Instant Messaging (IM) is a type of computer-mediated communication “involving two
52 parties and done in real time (synchronously)” (Baron 2013). Communication is facilitated
53 through written exchanges, and, like many other types of Computer Mediated
54 Communication, IM combines qualities typically associated with writing – such as lack of a
55 visual context and paralinguistic cues, physical absence of interlocutors – with properties of
56 spoken language, such as immediacy, informality, reduced planning and editing, and rapid
57 feedback (Georgakopoulou 2011). IM has thus been described as a ‘hybrid’ register
58 (Tagliamonte & Denis 2008). Since IM is primarily used for one-to-one dialogue, it can be
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argued that it is usually a private means of communication (as compared, say, to posts in public fora such as Twitter and other social media), and the effects of a third observing party on the interaction have therefore unsurprisingly received no scholarly attention up until now. While IM conversations are textually produced and messages remain on the screen for some time, they are often only archived if a user specifically sets up their IM client to do so. Thus, while an awareness of the possibility that their contributions are being recorded may be part of the normative practices of the medium, participants are unlikely to frame their ‘talk’ for an indeterminate future audience in the same way as one would through, for example, formal writing.

Our data¹ are drawn from a study² which set out to examine the relationship between language and online identity, and to investigate the linguistic criteria that are sufficient and necessary for one individual to assume the identity of another (see Grant and MacLeod, 2016 for more on the wider project). Along with policing partners we were aiming to contribute to a better understanding of the processes at work during identity assumption tasks by online undercover police officers, particularly within the context of sexual grooming investigations, in order to inform the training we currently deliver to them. We designed a series of experiments aimed at systematically investigating how adept individuals are at spotting the substitution of one interlocutor with another, what linguistic criteria individuals emulate when engaged in impersonation, what criteria arouse suspicion in individuals looking for the possibility of impersonation by their interlocutor, and the confidence with which these judgements are made. We were also interested in the effects of preparation by impersonators on how likely they were to go undetected. The experiments were run with four different groups of participants, including University students (UG and PG), attendants at our annual International Summer School in Forensic Linguistic Analysis (ISSFLA) and trainee undercover police officers (hereafter UCOs). The experimental design required participants to act either in the role of ‘Judge’, whereby they were required to be on the look-out for impersonation and record their thoughts on when it occurred, or as one member of a ‘Pair’ interacting with the ‘Judge’, one of whom took over from and impersonated the other at some unspecified point in the IM conversation. Thus, participants in the data extracts discussed in the next section are labelled either as ‘Judge’ or ‘Pair’. Written consent was gathered from all participants prior to their involvement in the experimental tasks.

The use of experimental data in which the participants are in no doubt that their behaviour will be observed presents opportunities for a level of analysis of the chat logs that is simply not possible with data generated within genuine criminal investigations, where at least one participant is generally unaware that their talk will be subjected to later scrutiny. In this paper we examine how an awareness of the experimental setting specifically influences the unfolding IM interaction. Exploring the roles ascribed to the researcher may not be one of the central aims of the project, but occurrences of the phenomenon have emerged from the data and presented themselves as worthy of further study. It is this aspect, rather than identity disguise and detection thereof, that is our concern here.

¹ The data are available via Open Access and can be found at the following link: <http://reshare.ukdataservice.ac.uk/852099/>

² ESRC Grant Ref: ES/L003279/1

Setting aside for now the overall aims of the wider project and our interest in impersonation and detection of disguise, we focus here on examining the role of the researcher in the IM data. We draw on the concepts of footing (Goffman, 1981) and audience design (Bell, 1984; 2001) to examine the alignments created and maintained by the participants through their interaction with each other. We begin by identifying occasions in the chat logs where participants either directly or indirectly addressed the recording process and/or the future reader(s) of the chat. Like Gordon (2012) we focus here on the different footings, or alignments, that are taken up by participants in relation to the recorder and to the future reader(s). It is through these footings that particular identities are produced and maintained. Inasmuch as we are focusing on participant orientations we necessarily draw on some discussions within Conversation Analysis that apply Goffman's ideas about footings and frames to explicate the processes at work during interaction (see, for example, Clayman, 1992).

Bell (1984) uses Goffman's (1981) notion of participation frameworks as a starting point, and proposes four distinct ways in which audiences of talk might be aligned by the speaker, moving from the direct addressee of the talk, to a ratified auditor, through to overhearers and eavesdroppers, with each role differing in terms of whether their presence is known by the speaker, whether they are a ratified participant, and whether they are addressed.. At the heart of audience design is the assumption that "speakers design their style primarily for and in response to their audience" (Bell, 2001: 143). In other words, the amount of influence each audience role has over the style of the speaker diminishes as we move further away from the speaker. Thus, the displaying of orientations to potential audiences beyond one's immediate addressee is not in itself a novel concept. In the 2001 revisiting of the model, Bell added the role of 'referee', which he described as a "third persons not usually present at an interaction but possessing such salience for a speaker that they influence style in their absence...referee design can involve a speaker shifting to identify more strongly with their own in-group, or to an outgroup with which they wish to identify" (2001: 147). However, as noted above, participants in the current study were aware of the experimental context, and the researcher was oriented to as a recipient of the talk, as we shall see in the following section.

4. Orienting to the Experimental Context: Results and Discussion

Gordon (2012) notes that the way participants talk *to* the recorder/researcher differs from how they talk *about* it (p. 314), and it is on this basis that this analysis is organised around these two distinct processes.

4.1 Talking *to* the researcher

In the following extract, from an all-female triad of undergraduate students, the participants explicate their awareness that their language will be observed by the first author, and the location of this explicating also reveals their alignment with a 'sociolinguistics experiment' footing.

Prior to the start of this extract the participants have been discussing Judge 23's recent trip into the city centre, where she did not buy any shoes but returned with rice cakes and carrots – a hoard which Pair 24_22 then evaluates, as 'boring'.

Extract 1: UG

1	14:23	Judge 23:	lkr! What has happened to me?!?!?!?
2	14:23	Pair 24_22:	lkr?
3	14:23	Pair 24_22:	that is a bit slangy for you
4	14:23	Judge 23:	lkr = I know right
5	14:23	Pair 24_22:	I know what it meant !!!
6	14:23	Pair 24_22:	hahahhaa
7	14:23	Pair 24_22:	knew*
8	14:23	Judge 23:	ahahaha sure you did
9	14:23	Pair 24_22:	I did indeed
10	14:24	Judge 23:	And I totally believe you
11	14:24	Pair 24_22:	don't get all chef-y on me
12	14:24	Pair 24_22:	yes yes
13	14:24	Pair 24_22:	hahah
14	14:24	Pair 24_22:	I keep thinking what N is going to think when she reads
15			these transcripts
16	14:24	Judge 23:	She's just going to laugh at us all
17	14:24	Pair 24_22:	Indeed!
18	14:24	Judge 23:	When you're reading this, N, please remember I gave you a
			cookie!
19	14:25	Pair 24_22:	Hahaha
20	14:25	Judge 23:	So don't judge me too harshly.
21	14:25	Judge 23:	Mel and Samia though? Ehh.
22	14:25	Judge 23:	Ahahaha
23	14:25	Pair 24_22:	Haha more like Adele!
24	14:25	Judge 23:	Cookies absolve me of all insanity

In line 1 Judge 23 uses the initialism 'lkr' (I Know Right), an internet slang term used to indicate that the speaker agrees with some previously expressed idea – in this case that buying rice cakes and carrots is 'boring' – and this is immediately and somewhat mercilessly picked up on by Pair 24_22 in lines 2 and 3. The expression of familiarity with Judge 23's usual style 'that is a bit slangy for you' frame their relationship as one in which they interact regularly. Indeed, this conversation takes place in the 'Homework' condition, so on that basis alone we would expect the participants to have some knowledge of how the other tends to use language online. Judge 23 initially misinterprets Pair 24_22's outrage as a genuine request for a definition of 'lkr', which she duly provides on line 4. Pair 24_22 exasperatedly informs her on line 5 that she does not require the definition, at which point both participants indicate their amusement at the misunderstanding with laughter stylisations on lines 6 and 8. Judge 23 uses sarcasm on lines 8 and 10 to indicate that, despite Pair 24_22's protestation on line 9, the former does not accept that the latter understood what was meant by the slang term. It is worth mentioning here that although Judge 23 is *expressing* disbelief, the disbelief is not necessarily genuine; a more likely interpretation is that she is 'teasing' Pair 24_22.

Identities are already in the process of being constructed here as Pair 24_22 works hard to align herself with the internet-slang savvy Judge 23 while still maintaining her identity as a skilled user of standard English for the benefit of the researcher (from whom she has received instruction in a number of English Language modules in the past), even going so far as to 'correct' her tense on lines 5 and 7 (where arguably there was no 'mistake' in the first place). What happens next, however, provides firm evidence for the important role in identity construction played by the observation process. Referring to the first author by first initial, both participants muse on what judgements might be made about the group (lines 14-17). On lines 18 and 20 Judge 23 then directly addresses The first author and mock 'pleads' with her not to judge her too harshly on the content of the conversation, on the basis that she gave her a cookie prior to the experiment starting. It is with the introduction of the giving of the cookie that Judge 23 instigates a shift in footing from one in which she is an undergraduate student and the first author is a member of academic staff in a position to sit in judgement over their patterns of language use – a footing that does not usually provide for the sharing of confectionary – to an arguably more egalitarian relationship. Since this more equal footing does not provide for one participant to judge the language of the other in the same way a student-academic footing arguably does, Judge 23's invocation of the cookie provides the 'absolution' she refers to in line 24. Thus, the recording process is a powerful device for the negotiation of identities and relationships. The positioning of the participants in the 'experiment' frame is collaboratively maintained by the participants on lines 21 and 23, as, punctuated with laughter, they discuss which individual might be behind the keyboard at the Pair's end of the chat.

It is unlikely to be a coincidence that Pair 24_22 chooses the point immediately after a discussion about internet slang use to situate herself firmly within the frame of an observed experiment concerning language patterns. All the participants are in their second year of an undergraduate degree in English Language; all have had some input about sociolinguistic research and language variation (they received some of this from the first author in their first year, explaining the student-academic footing that pervades the extract). It is armed with this knowledge that we can begin to unpick the patterns of linguistic self-awareness evident in the extract above, and understand why this self-awareness is made so visible to this observer in particular.

It is not only the undergraduates who set up an alignment with the researcher as being in some position to judge the content of their conversation. In the following extract, an all-female triad from the police trainee UCO group directly address the first author, this time regarding the content of their conversation, rather than the language used.

Extract 2: UCO

1	18:09	JUDGE C:	Had to 'work' in a fetish club. The most embarrassing bit
2			was leaving the hotel in my gear with everyone thinking I
3			was on the game
4	18:09	Pair C:	brill!!!
5	18:10	Pair C:	bet that was an entertaining job!
6	18:10	Pair C:	did you get a taste for it and just continue then?
7	18:11	JUDGE C:	Just a bit. It brought back memories of my dogging days
8	18:11	Pair C:	i think that's a song.....dog days are over
9	18:11	JUDGE C:	they so are after today

10 18:11 Pair C: esp when they read all this chat
 11 18:12 JUDGE C: I know this is all made up DR!
 12 18:12 JUDGE C: I prefer being a hooker
 13 18:12 Pair C: of course!
 14 18:12 Pair C: to the people reading this in their
 15 dissertation,.....SORRY!
 16 18:12 JUDGE C: We are nice girls really
 17 18:12 Pair C: NOT
 18 18:13 JUDGE C: It's been a long couple of days
 19 18:13 Pair C: As the saying goes.....sorry I'm not sorry!

Extract 2 displays an orientation on the part of the speakers to the experimental setting and to multiple future audiences, including on line 11 ‘DR’, which is the term of address used several times throughout the chat to refer to the first author, who is overseeing the experiment, and on line 14 ‘the people reading this in their dissertation’. Appearing sequentially following a segment discussing fetish clubs and dogging³ these turns signal an understanding of those activities as unorthodox. The segment addressed to the first author appears to indicate a joking viewpoint that Judge C will be judged and admonished professionally for the content of her contributions as she and Pair C collectively put forward a scenario in which Judge C’s ‘dog days are over’ (line 8) especially when ‘they read all this chat’ (line 9). It is worth considering for a moment who is meant by ‘they’. Here and elsewhere in chats between this triad, an assumption that the future audience of the chat holds some responsibility for the participants’ professional progression on the basis of its content is made evident in the talk. This is not the case – although as external consultants involved in training we take part in assessing the trainees on their performance in the roleplaying task, the conversations collected under experimental conditions and reported on here are a separate matter and did not form part of any assessed work. Nevertheless, the trainee group constantly alluded to the situation as if they were being ‘tested’ in some way. It may be worth considering that the training environment had ‘primed’ them with these expectations, which was not true of the three other groups.

To counter any potential professional admonishment, Judge C jokingly directly addresses the first author on line 11 to inform her that the stories are all fabrications – evidence for the ‘jokiness’ arising from the exclamation mark on line 11 and the comment subsequent to the assertion of fabrication that she ‘prefer[s] being a hooker’ on line 12. The segment addressed directly ‘to the people reading this in their dissertation’ (line 14) is slightly different, and appears to be designed to protect the participants against judgements on their moral character- ‘SORRY!’ and ‘We are nice girls really’ – rather than against professional impingement. Thus, the researcher is cast as a decision maker of sorts, with professional gatekeeping responsibilities, while the other ‘people’ are simply being requested not to see the participants in a bad light.

In the following extract, taken from the same triad as Extract 2 above, it is not the researcher that the participants address, but the two senior police officers who are running the training

³ ‘Dogging’ is a British English term used to describe the activity of having sexual intercourse in public places, often with strangers watching.

course which the participants are currently following. It appears from this extract that the participants are under the impression the chat will be read by the trainers on some subsequent occasion, and they light-heartedly address this occasion thus:

Extract 3: UCO

1	17:00	Pair C:	soooooo.....heres a game... who would you rather do...
2	17:01	JUDGE C:	oh no. Go on.....
3	17:01	Pair C:	jim or gary?
4	17:01	Pair C:	seeing as they are reading this... hello boys!
5	17:01	JUDGE C:	This is going to get personal. we may fail the course
6	17:02	Pair C:	or pass...
7	17:02	Pair C:	depending on who u pick
8	17:02	JUDGE C:	It's not too late.
9	17:02	Pair C:	dont be shy....
10	17:02	JUDGE C:	Ahh yes. I LOVE them all

Pair C introduces the new topic of the two male course leaders, framing her question of which man she prefers as a 'game', and displaying an alignment to the men as the direct addressees of her 'hello boys' on line 4, leaving us in no doubt that they are cast as auditors for the initial question. The use of 'boys' here is worthy of further comment, having as it does the effect of downgrading the footing from the highly hierarchical one in might otherwise be read to be, to one where commenting on one's attraction might be considered acceptable. Regardless of this label, much as the first author was framed as having some responsibility for the speakers' progression through the course in Extract 2, both participants here visibly orient to 'jim' and 'gary' as holding positions that allow them to decide whether the speakers pass or fail the course, and that this decision may be reliant on Judge C's answer to the initial question (lines 5-7). Judge C topicalises this footing as a means avoiding giving an answer – 'we may fail the course' (line 5) and 'it's not too late' (line 8), thereby constructing a 'mature' and 'professional' identity. She finally responds to Pair C's encouragement and rather more positive framing of the situation – that they may 'pass depending on who u pick' (line 7) by providing an answer that is readable as positive and inclusive of both of her superiors (line 10).

The extracts analysed here demonstrate that there are a number of ways that perceived future audiences of IM talk can be positioned by speakers once they have been cast in the role of addressee. Whether it is the researcher, trainers, or unnamed (and unknown) 'others', these ratified participants are framed as holding positions of authority over the style of language used, the content of the conversation, or judgements about participants' character. We have also shown, however, that such footings are not set in stone – the recording process offers opportunities for participants to re-cast the roles, and to negotiate their own and others identities.

4.2 Talking *about* the research(er)

There are a number of occasions where participants align themselves with the future audience(s) of the chat without explicitly addressing them – that is to say, when participants

talk *about* the future audience or the setting they are in, rather than talking directly *to* the future audience, as we saw in previous examples.

As Speer & Hutchby (2003) point out, it is commonly argued that participants who know they are being recorded will censor themselves when they speak “because they are made nervous by the presence of the recording device, or are concerned about saying things which are delicate, inappropriate, and so on” (p.319). While this has long been considered a limitation of recorded language use, an alternative perspective is to focus on these occasions as points at which what is considered to be ‘inappropriate’ for recorded discussion is explicated, and the impact of discussing these topics is oriented to. The following extract, involving the same female UCO triad as Extracts 2 and 3, provides an example of participants topicalising the issue of what should and should not be talked about within the conversation, with one of them stating at first that she will only tell her story ‘offline’. The participants are discussing Pair C’s relationship with her husband.

Extract 4: UCO

1	16:34	Pair C:	we are still at it like rabbits
2	16:34	JUDGE C:	oooooh! yeeeo!!!! go girl!
3	16:35	Pair C:	what does he think about going out with a girl in uniform?
4	16:35	JUDGE C:	he loves it, I'll tell u a story... offline lol
5	16:35	JUDGE C:	and when Im drunk
6	16:35	Pair C:	oooh tell me now. I'm sure the Dr won't mind li
7	16:36	Pair C:	hearing it
8	16:36	JUDGE C:	no i mite get in trouble lol
9	16:36	Pair C:	this is getting very interesting
10	16:36	JUDGE C:	does ur partner enjoy it too?
11	16:37	Pair C:	loves it. I have to wear it in bed
12	16:37	JUDGE C:	lol cant think of anyone who wouldnt lol
13	16:38	JUDGE C:	btw the boys are not hearing this convo!
14	16:38	Pair C:	haha. Not so attractive when you have tramps puke all
15			over it
16	16:38	JUDGE C:	not ruin the fantasy for them!

In this extract Pair C urges a reluctant Judge C to share her story online by reassuring her that ‘the Dr’ (the first author) ‘won’t mind [...] hearing it’, demonstrating an understanding of the first author not only as an observer of the interaction, but also as someone who is in a position to pass judgement on it, and this is shown to be an understanding shared by the participants as Judge C goes on to cast the first author as someone with whom she did not want to ‘get in trouble’. The context, then, is oriented to not only as an experiment, but as an examination of sorts. Despite this framing, the first author is also cast as a fellow, allied female – while the speakers are happy to continue the conversation about wearing of uniform in bed in the knowledge that the first author will at some point be a party to it, the topic is nevertheless explicitly marked as off limits for discussion around ‘the boys’ – the speakers’ male peers on the training course. Setting up this gender-based in-group out-group divide indicates that the first author, despite holding the perceived elevated status indicated by the

earlier comments, is nevertheless allowed access to this discussion on the basis of her membership of the same gender category as the participants.

A further point to be explored in this extract is the reaffirming of the participants' shared professional identity as evidenced in the discussion of the Police uniform. After Pair C indicates on line 11 that her partner is aroused by the uniform and she has to 'wear it in bed', this positive evaluation of the uniform is echoed by Judge C on line 12 where she frames it as a universal trend: 'cant think of anyone who wouldnt'. Pair C then addresses the professional reality of the matter: 'Not so attractive when you have tramps puke all over it' on line 14, thereby drawing a line between the perceived popular perspective of the uniform as sexually attractive – a viewpoint held by her presumably non-police partner, and the participants' own rather less glamorous shared experiences of the uniform within the professional sphere.

There are occasions where the participants orient not to the researcher *per se*, but to the experimental setting in which they are conversing. As outlined earlier, at some point within each fifteen-minute IM chat, the individual with whom the Judge is interacting is substituted with another individual. In the extract below, the Judge detects that the switch has occurred after an inconsistency emerges over whether their interlocutor has ever owned hamsters.

Extract 5: ISSFLA

1	17:15	Pair 7:	sure you were treating them right? 2 years doesn't seem a
2			lot
3	17:15	Judge 7:	hahay es
4	17:15	Judge 7:	look it up - that's about how long they live for
5	17:15	Pair 7:	guess ill have to trust you
6	17:15	Pair 7:	never had hamsters myself
7	17:15	Judge 7:	you just said you had....
8	17:16	Pair 7:	oops
9	17:16	Judge 7:	you have ruined this entire experiment
10	17:16	Judge 7:	well done!!!!!!!
11	17:16	Pair 7:	:P
12	17:16	Judge 7:	shall we stop talking now?
13	17:16	Pair 7:	nah, I think we can go on
14	17:17	Pair 7:	you'll have to establish when we switched over as well
15	17:17	Judge 7:	yes - I think I have already done that
16	17:17	Pair 7:	ok
17	17:17	Judge 7:	im hungry

It is not particularly relevant for current purposes to know when exactly the switch occurred, but it seems likely to have been shortly before the extract begins. Judge 7 exposes the content inconsistency on line 7, and this is followed up on line 9 by a positioning of Pair 7 as having 'ruined' the experiment with this inconsistency. Judge 7 questions whether this warrants the termination of the conversation, but is persuaded by Pair 7 that they can continue. The participants then orient to their narrow identities as constrained by the experimental conditions on lines 14 and 15, with Pair 7 setting out Judge 7's duties within the experiment

and Judge 7 claiming to have fulfilled these successfully. It seems unlikely that Judge 7 is being entirely serious in the graveness of their formulation of the experiment as being ‘ruined’, given the multiple exclamation points on line 10 and the relatively swift return to mundane topics on line 17. Rather, this performance of outrage towards an incident about which Pair 7 appears fairly indifferent appears largely designed to display Judge 7’s understanding of the experimental set-up and perception of the switch having occurred – for the benefit of the future audience as much as for Pair 7. Perhaps motivated by the setting – a course in forensic linguistic analysis – Judge 7 constructs an identity for themselves as having compet

ently fulfilled their duties as set out by the brief, an identity distinct from that of Pair 7 who has ‘ruined’ the experiment.

Not all groups appear motivated to frame their identities in such a positive manner. The next extract shows both speakers (from the UCO group) co-constructing the frame of the experimental setting as burdensome, and their own identities as reluctant participants.

Extract 6: UCO

1	19:16	JUDGE A:	talk about wasteing a few hours of my life
2	19:16	Pair A:	yeah innit man
3	19:17	Pair A:	we could be eating right now
4	19:17	Pair A:	or in gym
5	19:17	Pair A:	sarah was lucky
6	19:17	JUDGE A:	yeah thats a right result
7	19:17	JUDGE A:	five fucking minutes
8	19:17	Pair A:	55555555555555555555555555555555!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
9			!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!11
10	19:17	JUDGE A:	thats five too long
11	19:18	JUDGE A:	im so angry inside
12	19:18	Pair A:	lol jokes, in case this is read
13	19:18	Pair A:	are u pure raging?
14	19:18	JUDGE A:	im not joking
15	19:19	Pair A:	sorry
16	19:19	Pair A:	ive hit a block
17	19:19	JUDGE A:	so you should...
18	19:19	JUDGE A:	im fuming
19	19:20	Pair A:	ur hiding it well, u looked quite relaxed from behnid
20	19:20	JUDGE A:	i can feel a rage comming on
21	19:20	JUDGE A:	dont tempt me
22	19:20	Pair A:	i think theres some dirty chat going on with the others lol
23	19:21	JUDGE A:	why is every one type so fast
24	19:21	Pair A:	imy tummy is RUMBLING!
25	19:21	Pair A:	Its cos we're all angry
26	19:21	JUDGE A:	i have been up since five

The participants' involvement in the experiment is collaboratively represented here as 'wasting' [sic] their time (line 1), and keeping them away from other activities (lines 3 and

4), that another trainee avoiding it was ‘lucky’ (lines 5 and 6), that it will continue to take up more of their time and this is framed very negatively (lines 7-11) and that this has led to Judge A becoming ‘angry’ (line 12). The seriousness of his anger is reiterated on line 15 where he insists, in response to Pair A’s explicit invocation of the ‘observed’ frame on line 13, that he is ‘not joking’. In the face of Pair A’s overt reminder that the interaction is likely to be read subsequently, Judge A essentially rejects the warning – he appears not only to be aware of this, but in fact to be primarily orienting to this future audience. Judge A continues to characterise the experiment’s effect on his mood – ‘fuming’ (line 18) and ‘a rage’ (line 20), while both participants make explicit reference to the experimental conditions and the other participants on lines 19, 22, 23 and lastly 25, where Pair A extends Judge A’s angry mood to the entire UCO group – ‘its cos we’re all angry’, aligning them all as an in-group and speaking on their behalf.

Clearly the mode of communication here is being exploited to display dissatisfaction with the experimental conditions in which the participants find themselves, and the dissatisfaction is performed, at least in part, for the benefit of the future audience of the interaction. In the next extract, taken from one of the ISSFLA triads, the participants’ dissatisfaction with the conditions appears to take a ‘back seat’ to their desire not to appear in an unfavourable light to the future audience.

Extract 7: ISSFLA

1	15:50	Pair 2:	So here we are nearly at the end of this experiment and I am
2			glad
3			about that, aren't you?
4	15:50	Judge 2:	I am too.
5	15:51	Judge 2:	I have some lessons to take with me too.
6	15:51	Pair 2:	So now we just have to make this last a few more minutes but
7			let's go out with a blast.
8	15:51	Judge 2:	A big blast!
9	15:51	Pair 2:	What are the lessons?
10	15:52	Judge 2:	I sure shouldn't post that on twitter!
11	15:52	Judge 2:	Well, I now know I need to be more detailed in my
12			punctuations.
13	15:52	Pair 2:	Yes, just to clarify, I AM NOT A Terrorist
14	15:52	Judge 2:	:))
15	15:53	Judge 2:	I really don't expect you to be one
16	15:53	Pair 2:	You never know!
17	15:53	Judge 2:	But we just never can tell, you know?
18	15:53	Judge 2:	right!
19	15:53	Pair 2:	That's true.

The extract begins with both participants co-constructing the experiment as an event they are glad is almost over, with Judge 2 nevertheless situating it within the wider context of the Summer School from which he has ‘some lessons to take’, and Pair 2 framing its completion as achievable ‘just have to make this last a few more minutes’ and emphasising their mutual ability to make it a success ‘let’s go out with a blast’. This sentiment is echoed by Judge 2 on

line 7, who then plays on the literal meaning of ‘blast’ by joking that Pair 2 ‘sure shouldn’t post that on twitter!’. This warning is produced in the context of the discussion about what lessons have been learned from the Summer School, since part of the course content had involved the case of a man who successfully challenged his conviction for sending a ‘menacing electronic communication’, which had resulted from him tweeting a joke ‘threat’ to blow up a nearby airport after heavy snow forced its closure⁴. Thus, Pair 2’s potential actions are framed in the context of the so-called ‘Twitter Joke Trial’, leading Pair 2 on line 11 to ‘clarify, I AM NOT A Terrorist’. For whom is Pair 2 clarifying that he is not a terrorist? Given that it has already been demonstrated in this extract that the two speakers are acting within the same frame and with a shared background understanding of the case, it seems unlikely to be for Judge 2’s benefit (although Judge 2 does treat it thus on line 13). Rather, it appears this display demonstrates orientation to the experimental context and is produced for the benefit of the future audience – acknowledging that ‘go out with a blast’ can be construed in two ways, and drawing on his knowledge of the Twitter Joke Trial, Pair 2 jokingly asserts his identity as a non-terrorist.

5. Conclusions

The analyses presented above have demonstrated that participants exploit the process of being recorded in order to facilitate a range of activities. Some of the participants orient to the experimental context and the eventual audience of their interactions – whether this is the actual audience (the researcher) or some mistaken idea of other individuals – as being in a position to sit in judgement over their language use, conversational topics or moral character, as potentially having a say-so over their career development, or at any rate as an audience to be ‘impressed’ in some way. These functions were played out either directly, by casting the unseen individual(s) as addressee or explicitly orienting to them as an overhearer, or indirectly, where the context allowed for a reading where the researcher was the intended recipient.

Others exploit the experimental context as a ‘sounding board’ of sorts, in order to vent their dissatisfaction at being required to carry out the tasks. It is likely no coincidence that *these* instances were never characterised by the researcher being directly addressed, since she is likely perceived as the reason they are there. Rather, occasions of complaint were ostensibly directed at the other participant, but the context of the talk and relevant background knowledge allowed for alternative interpretations. Aside from participants being unhappy with the constraints of the experiment as shown here, there were a number of examples in the data of Undergraduates co-constructing complaints about their courses of study. Given the researcher’s position as a member of academic staff in their department it is likely that these too were produced at least partly for her benefit, as well as consolidating the participants’ shared identities as students of English at Aston University.

This article, focussing on text-mediated IM communication, provides support for the idea that the knowledge of having one’s language use recorded and subsequently scrutinised cannot simply be viewed as a constraint on ‘natural’ language production, but that participants

⁴ See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-19009344>

1 actively draw on it to carry out particular actions. The creation and maintenance of identities,
2 the situating of the chat in the wider context, and an array of other tasks are accomplished
3 through the positioning and repositioning of the researcher and the researched in relation to
4 particular footings and discourse roles. The process of interactions being shaped by
5 participants' awareness of being recorded and viewed at a later date has shown itself to be a
6 highly valuable focus of study.
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9 Certainly, the criticisms that are often levelled at the use of data that has been 'got up' by the
10 researcher – an issue that is "still something to be grappled with" (Potter 2002: 541) appear
11 less consternating when one considers researcher effects from this perspective. In contrast to
12 a viewpoint that sees the observation process as mere data contamination, a standpoint that
13 acknowledges the multi-faceted role it plays in creating participants' alignments allows for a
14 novel positioning of the researcher within the research site. Given the ongoing debates about
15 what constitutes 'good' data (see Speer 2002b; Goodman & Speer 2016), it is clear that
16 moving 'beyond the observer's paradox' (Gordon 2012), in researching both spoken
17 interaction and online language use is a movement in the right direction.
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21 We conclude with some thoughts on the implications of these findings for the policing
22 context of online operations against would-be paedophiles, as introduced earlier in this paper.
23 During online operations, one participant, the UCO, is fully aware of the context within
24 which they are operating, and is likely to produce 'talk' that orients to this investigative
25 context, in a way that the perpetrator does not (see Haworth, 2013 for more on the mis-match
26 of orientations between police and lay participants). This mirrors the awareness of the
27 experimental context that we have demonstrated in this paper, and has the potential to
28 jeopardise online operations if the suspect becomes aware of it. The findings discussed in this
29 paper, and an awareness of the implications of these conflicting orientations, might thus be a
30 worthwhile addition to future outings of our training course.
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